

The Electric Mercury

U.S. Army Medical Command Electronic News Summary, February 2003

**For more on these and other important stories, see February 2003 printed issue of The Mercury.
This is a service of the Public Affairs Office, Headquarters MEDCOM.**

Army begins to vaccinate troops against smallpox

Military service members and some civilian employees are now receiving the smallpox vaccine. Medical personnel are among priority groups being vaccinated first. The vaccine is licensed by the Food and Drug Administration and is from the same stocks used before routine vaccinations stopped in the late 1970s. The vaccine is rated safe and effective, though past experience indicates that, for every 1 million people vaccinated the first time, 14 to 52 people may have potentially life-threatening reactions.

Rules limit residents' hours

Concern about exhausted physicians-in-training making errors recently led the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) to restrict residents' working hours. Some Army GME directors aren't sure the rules are an improvement, but will comply to keep accreditation. Program impact varies. Now residents must work no more than 80 hours a week, no more than 24 hours straight (plus six hours to complete work already begun), and get at least 10 hours off between shifts. Many AMEDD programs are already in compliance. However, some may need to make adjustments and directors are studying how to do so. The new standards take effect July 2003.

Survey gives insights into health-provider satisfaction

An online survey of doctors, nurses and physician assistants reveals that most of these providers are fairly satisfied working for the Army, although there are some irritants and shortcomings that should be addressed. Goal of the survey was to find ways to improve provider satisfaction (and, indirectly, patient satisfaction). Respondents provided a number of recommendations. More than 2,500 people participated in the survey, mostly primary-care providers. Both military and civilian professionals were included.

AMEDD people prepared to answer call

Many in the AMEDD will be affected as more of our forces move to the Middle East, writes LTG James B. Peake, Army Surgeon General and MEDCOM commander. It affects every one of us in one way or another...It all depends on you. No matter in what part of our medical system you find yourself, your best efforts and your individual contribution absolutely matter! As it has been often in the 227 years of our history, it is again time to roll up your sleeves. Our nation is counting on you, he writes.

Other important stories in this month's edition of the *Mercury* include:

- Over 400,000 military pharmacy-by-mail customers will be switched March 1 to a new TRICARE Mail Order Pharmacy contractor. For most, the impact will be limited.
- Walter Reed Army Medical Center experts look through Landstuhl Regional Medical Center microscopes, saving time and resources, thanks to magic of telepathology.
- Walter Reed Army Institute of Research scientists are developing four new vaccines to help warfighters combat one of the most common ailments of deployed troops: diarrhea.
- The art of making crowns, bridges and teeth by hand is alive and well at William Thomas Fischer Army Dental Laboratory at Fort Gordon, Ga.
- The Surgeon General's Award for Military Academic Excellence goes to COL Stephen Hetz. Surgeon General's Physician Recognition Awards go to LTC Ralph Erickson, MAJ George Maxwell and CPT Sean Siler.
- Lawrence and Jennifer Fenti are husband and wife, soldier-medics and record-breaking powerlifters. Lawrence is a radiology instructor at the AMEDD Center and School; Jennifer is a community health nurse at Brooke Army Medical Center.
- Nicole Candy works in Tripler Army Medical Center's specialized nursing care center, but spends much of her off-duty time paddling with the Healani Canoe Club.
- Three-year "Medics of the Coldest War" series about Army Medicine in the Korean War continues with second of several chapters about Mobile Army Surgical Hospitals.
- Photos from Afghanistan: SPC Brandy Kaputa, 339th Combat Support Hospital, deworms girl in Afghan village; SPC Kristina Kennedy, 339th Combat Support Hospital, comforts patient at Bagram Air Base; PFC Shawn Toler, 48th Combat Support Hospital, adjusts oxygen for patient at Bagram Air Base; CPT Keith Diebert, 424th Medical Logistics Battalion, examines patient's eyes through slit lamp; SPC Juliet Kirkpatrick, 791st Preventive Medicine Detachment, weighs mouse in hantavirus study at Bagram Air Base.
- Other photos: Soldiers load casualties into a helicopter of the 68th Medical Company (Air Ambulance) in Alaska exercise; 2LT Cheri Lay and SFC Owen Carter, 67th Combat Support Hospital, visit child being treated at Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo.
- Commentary: "Identity thieves hit TRICARE contractor," by Assistant Secretary of Defense (Health Affairs) Dr. William Winkenwerder explains steps to help those whose data was stolen; "NCOs should maintain high standards for soldiers," by MEDCOM CSM James Aplin, stresses difference between taking care of soldiers and coddling them.
- "Don't Let Your Smile Become Extinct" is theme for National Children's Dental Health Month, writes U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine expert. She provides tips on how to avoid and control childhood dental problems.